Middle East
Lebanon ME1

COTTON IN THE MIDDLE EAST

[illegible] requires the general food supply and particularly their diets, which even are not noticeably better than in the surrounding countries. They also ought to raise the income of the farming group and are anxious to increase exports to achieve a more natural trade balance. Commodity exports are three to four times the value of exports.

AGRICULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

[illegible] The various missions that have been studying the agricultural resources of the country report that opportunities for development are excellent. A United Nations Mission expressed the belief that the cultivated area might be doubled by reducing the fallow and grassland, and that 500,000 acres could be irrigated with water from the numerous mountain streams if dams, reservoirs, and canals were built. This Mission was encouraging also about the possibilities of increasing productivity.

The Mission submitted a long and detailed list of recommendations, the major ones of which called for: (a) developing an adequate scientific and technical staff; (b) establishing a more effective extension system; (c) organizing a central experiment station; (d) expanding the agricultural education program; and (e) efficiently utilizing water resources.[1]

The Mission specifically encouraged the expansion of fruit production, more interest in dairying, and the establishment of more agricultural processing plants.[2] The group did not encourage grain production, feeling that the limited acreage could be utilized more efficiently in the production of specialized agricultural commodities, and that it would prove more economical to buy wheat when it can be produced more cheaply.

Other agricultural agencies concur in the main with these conclusions and recommendations. A Point Four group, just getting established, is working along these broad lines.

COTTON

[illegible] Lebanon has grown some cotton for many years. The crop declined to an insignificant level years ago and production did not pick up again until the period of high prices in 1950 and 1951. Lebanon as a whole has not joined the trend, prevalent in the Middle East, of reducing cotton acreage now that prices have dropped.

Production increased from about 6,000 bales a few years ago to 23,700 bales in 1951-52, the highest in recent times, and with expanded acreage the crop is expected to be raised this season, 1952-53, to between 25,000 and 30,000 bales.

Cotton production is concentrated in the northern Akkar plain near the Syrian border and in the valleys. For the most part irrigation is used.

Farms are fairly small and cotton usually is grown as one of several crops in a general farming system.

Yields averaged about 180 pounds, less than in the better cotton-growing areas of Syria. American Upland, mainly Acala, Lone Star, and Lockett varieties, are grown almost entirely.

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[1] Report of the United States-Lebanon Agricultural Mission, United States Department of Agriculture, September, 1952, p. 5.

[2] Ibid., p. 6.

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COTTON IN LEBANON

There are said to be five cotton gins in the country, all owned by textile mills. Several are now gins, including one new one.

No one expects cotton acreage to climb appreciably, even though cotton normally returns more money to the farmer than other general crops, particularly in years of high prices. Government agricultural officials and industrial establishment people agree their farmers are simply more interested in other crops and the country as a whole considers food crops more important.

The consensus is that the crop may expand by a few thousand bales if the price is favorable.

COTTON TEXTILES

The cotton spinning industry has about 70,000 spindles, of which 50,000 were operating in early 1962. The weaving industry reports 600 power looms, about 300 hand looms, and a number of small knitting mills operating at capacity. The spindles and most of the power looms are located in six mills which are privately owned by Lebanese industrialists. Most of these spinning mills were built in the late thirties. Some installed second-hand equipment though the majority bought new equipment from Germany, France, United Kingdom, and Japan. Spinning capacity has remained fairly stable during the past few years but knitting and weaving capacity has expanded considerably.

Until the dissolution of the customs union with Syria in 1950, the industries of the two countries were complementary. Lebanon sold from 50 to 60 per cent of its yarn to Syria and bought cloth. The imposition of duties by Syria and the expansion of the Syrian spinning industry virtually stopped this trade. The Lebanese now want to install more looms to balance their mills and consume the output of yarns. Expansion of the cotton textile industry is expected to be along these lines.

At present the cotton textile industry is protected by import duties which average about 30 per cent ad valorem. There are complaints by some local industrialists that this is not adequate. Others maintain that relatively low wages and comparatively high machine efficiency enable them not only to operate successfully in the domestic market but also to compete to a limited extent on the foreign market. These two opinions, reported by the American Vice Consul in Beirut who has studied the industry, likely reflect the range of efficiency.

Cotton yarn exports in 1961 totaled 600 tons in counts from 12s to 40s. This went primarily to Rumania, Pakistan, Cyprus, Aden, Egypt, and Belgium. In the same year the country exported 1,137 tons of cotton cloth, mostly coarse gray goods to Italy, Sudan, Iraq, and other neighboring countries. Imports of yarn goods at 1,500 tons were almost equal to exports. Imports for the most part were dyed and printed goods in the specialty lines.

Normally Lebanese mills use about 80 per cent Syrian cotton and the balance local and Egyptian. The sources in 1961 were: Syrian, 60 per cent; Lebanese, 20 per cent; Egyptian, 10 per cent; and American, 10 per cent.